

I am pleased to be with you today to mark the christening of a new ship which will sail the Arctic waters, the M.V. Arctic. I congratulate the Minister of Transport, the Honourable Otto Lang, and the other promoters of this vast project. The Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs, the Honourable Hugh Faulkner, wishes to express his appreciation to you for having invited us here and in having allowed us to join you at the launching of this ship.

The Department of Indian and Northern Affairs is pleased on this occasion to present a book on Captain Joseph-Elzéar Bernier, who was the commander of the first M.V. Arctic, and his contribution to the Canadian sovereignty in the Arctic.

BY  
Some people refer to the Arctic as "the promised land", giving the impression that the Arctic has no history.

M.P. FOR LINCOLN.  
But, during the late 1880's and the early 1900's, when explorers ventured to Africa and Asia, they too went into the freezing and remote lands of the Arctic and Antarctic.

During the 1880's, a figure appeared who was to dominate Canadian northern exploration. This colourful, courageous and headstrong man was Captain Joseph-Elzéar Bernier of Sisseton, Québec.

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THE MINISTER OF INDIAN AND NORTHERN AFFAIRS  
ON THE OCCASION OF THE PRESENTATION OF A BOOK  
ON CAPTAIN J.E. BERNIER

BY

W.W. ANDRES,  
M.P. FOR LINCOLN,  
ST. CATHARINES, ONTARIO.

JUNE 2, 1978.

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Near the end of the Victorian age, southern Canadians looked upon Arctic regions to be excessively cold, frozen deserts and bleak wastelands. Indeed, even today - 75 years later, a great many Canadians know little about the Arctic.

The main exploration ventures into the Arctic were undertaken not by Canadians, but by foreigners. Although the Canadian Government dispatched a great number of expeditions into the North, it did not ensure a permanent Canadian presence.

Nothing in Captain Bernier's early life foretold of his dedication to establishing Canadian sovereignty in the Arctic. At first it was his passion for discovery -- his hope of conquering the North Pole that steered him towards the Arctic. However, this passion for discovery was transformed into an undertaking whose main purpose was spreading Canada's sovereignty over the North Pole.

In 1904, the Federal Government decided to purchase an ice-resistant ship. On Bernier's suggestion, the Gauss, renamed the Arctic, was chosen. During the summer of that same year, the Minister of Navy and Fisheries decided to send the Arctic up north, not to discover the North Pole, but, Sir Wilfrid Laurier stated:





"The Arctic will be under the command of Captain Bernier. This boat will carry an officer and ten men of the mounted police, apart from the crew of the Ship. Their instructions are to patrol the waters, to find suitable locations for posts, to establish those posts and to assert the jurisdiction of Canada."

During his numerous expeditions, Captain Bernier made several proclamations laying claim to northern lands. Of the explorers who strove to extend Canada's sovereignty in the Arctic, on behalf of the Canadian Government, Bernier was most active.

From 1895 until his death in 1934, through his discussions with politicians and by his public declarations, he never ceased to stress the need for Canada to affirm its jurisdiction in the Arctic. There is no doubt that Bernier was endowed with extraordinary foresight, an inborn sense of the scope of Canada's sovereignty in the Arctic.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am delighted to introduce the author of the magnificent book on Captain Bernier, Mrs. Yolande Dorion-Robitaille of Québec. May this book imprint on the minds of all Canadians the reality of the Canadian North and its special character.





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